

ENVELOPE SERIES

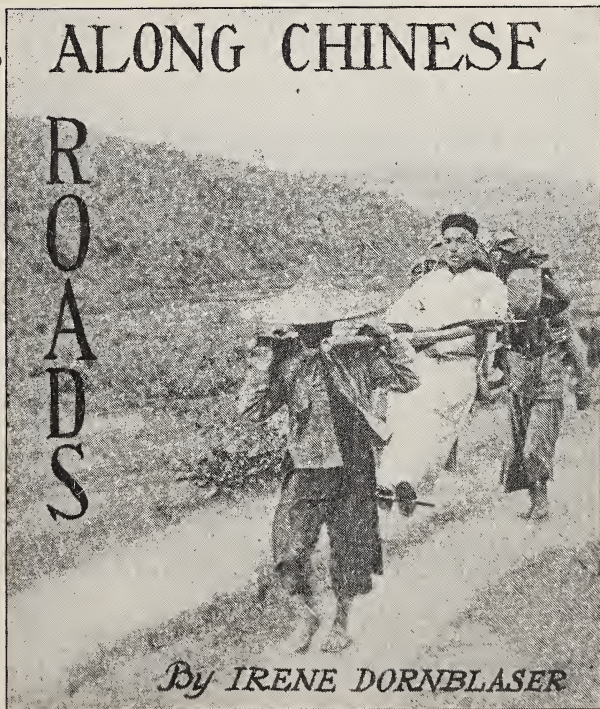
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ALONG CHINESE

ROADS



By IRENE DORNBLASER

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A QUARTERLY

Introductory Note



Miss Dornblaser went to China in 1910, and was designated to be a teacher in the Woman's Board School for Girls at Dionglloh, in the Foo-chow Mission. She has been brought up in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of which her father is a distinguished minister. From her private letters to friends in this country the Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the Lutheran Church was permitted to publish, in an attractive pamphlet, some of Miss Dornblaser's sketches of "Every Day Life in China." The American Board has the consent of this sister society to reprint portions of its pamphlet in this way, and thus offers the readers of the *Envelope Series* a good successor to Mr. Holbrook's "Along Turkish Highways," published in the issue for January, 1912.

W. E. S.

Along Chinese Roads

BY

IRENE LE WALL DORNBLASER

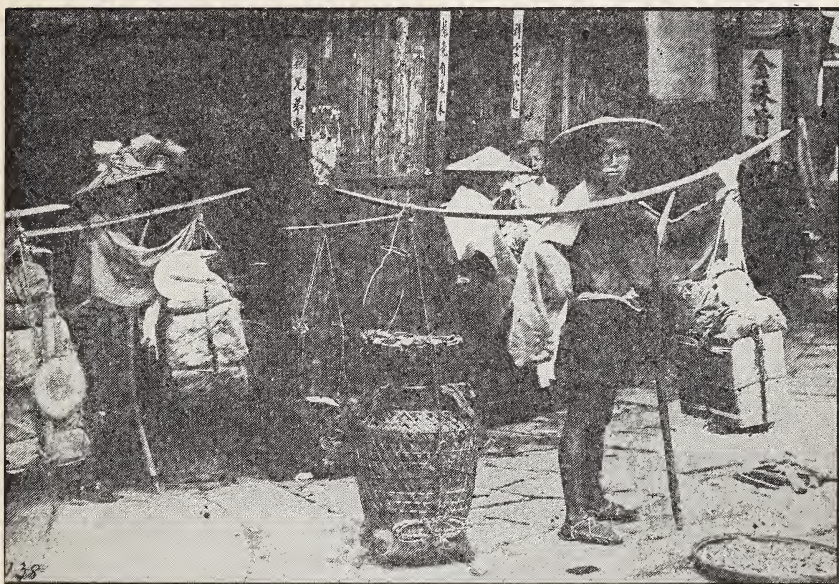
OF DIONGLOH

Now comes my tale of tales! I have been initiated! And no Alpha Xi Delta molasses and coal oil and fly-paper is any longer worthy of the name in my estimation. It consisted of going to native church one afternoon. Miss Shepherd immediately suggested giving me some old clothes to wear, and when I wondered why, she began an account of conditions calculated to prepare me for the ordeal; but not even her vivid descriptions led me to expect all that I found. As we started away from her home in Kulong-su, the foreign residence section, and passed down a seven-foot road toward the jetty (pier), I asked whether all the streets were like these, mentally meaning so narrow and irregular and unattractive. She simply laughed. (I think she enjoyed the prospect of the shock that was coming.) I never imagined anything so filthy, so tight, so sickening as those Amoy streets, through which we passed that afternoon to the mission chapel. After the first turn, when we could no longer see the water front, with nothing but tight, con-torted passageways behind, before and on all sides of us, and with the one in which we were crowded full to suf-

focation, my one feeling was an almost desperate desire to get out. It seemed a labyrinth, from which the only possible escape would be by means of wings. It seemed hopeless to get out to the air and daylight, by going ahead, and equally hopeless to try to retrace our steps. Furthermore, there would be no room between the tops of the buildings and the drooping signs and the wooden braces to the walls, to spread wings and fly out. There was nothing to do but trust my guide. We could not walk side by side; there was not room, and we could not talk for the din all about us. I could only follow a few feet behind and be thankful for an occasional word. Not that the sights were not interesting. I could hardly have had time for conversation if it had been possible. But if you can imagine anything as being so interesting that it was sickening to one's heart and stomach, you have some idea of the charms of Amoy.

The houses were close together, with never an inch between them. The front was open to the street, if street it can be called, and one could look far into the black depths of a foul interior, huddled full of dirty children, drugged sleepers and drudging toilers. Some of the front rooms were idol shops; some tailor shops; some eating places, with the cooking going on right there; others, meat and fish markets. Men were cleaning chickens and other suspicious-looking animals in buckets of filthy scrub water, and hanging them up where the dirty chair coolies brushed them as they passed, shouting and swearing and quarreling. Others were cooking rice, and bowls of it standing out where the drippings from the

eaves fell into it. Some were sitting on their haunches “shovelling in” the vile-smelling food, while chickens, hairless dogs and pigs groveled at their feet. The street itself was usually covered with foot-square flagstone, though in many places it was only mud; but it made little difference, it was mud anyhow, soft, watery, black ooze, in which the coolies bare feet “squashed” and “spanked”



Coolies at the Shop Doors

and ours reluctantly waded. But the pigs seemed to enjoy it! Really without a bit of exaggeration, I saw many spots right where we were walking on our way to church that looked exactly like the mud holes in which our American farmers let their pigs wallow. And it all seemed inseparably connected with the food everywhere

in evidence, for the odors of boiling rice, stewing meat, onions, butchering, vile tobacco, rank opium, of pigs and dogs and human filth, all made one grand total of "sea-sickness." * * * And to add to it all, sickening sights of uncared-for diseases met us on all hands. One man's whole face seemed eaten away, in a manner I could not dare to describe even on paper; another had a huge growth hanging to a sack of skin from his nose half way to his waist.

And not only such stomach-sickening sights, but the wretchedness and suffering of the people, their bitterness and anger and hatred, their agonizing labor without any Sabbath rest, and the knowledge that most of them had probably never heard of the Saviour and might die in their terrible misery without ever knowing of His rest and peace, made my heart almost burst. In spite of my desire to bear witness in this land to the *joy* of the Christian life, my eyes were swimming in tears that Sunday afternoon.

* * * * The Chinese are a dirty people. There are exceptions, of course, such as my teacher, Mr. Pang. Pang Seang means Pang Mr. or Professor; the surname comes first in Chinese. He and his family are delightful people. They and their house are immaculate, and they try to have real refinement. But their house is so pitifully poor, and it is a fairly good Chinese house. It looks just like an unpainted stable with no glass windows, only wooden slats in little square holes. It is wretchedly dark inside. Theirs is a better house than the majority, since it has a board floor. Most of the

houses are mud. So is the plastering; all plastering and "cement" is just mud, and, of course, is not very durable.

I think you probably have very little idea of Chinese roads. The streets in the city are about two-thirds the width of an American alley. They usually are paved with long, flat stones, about a foot and a half by eight inches, though here and there they break up into



Looking Down a City Street

cobblestones, or rather, broken pieces of flat stones. The houses generally front on the street, and if they are shops, have their wares on counters that stand on the street. At night these are taken in and board walls are put up, closing the house; but in the day time one can look right through to the inner court, which every house

possesses—if he can see through the darkness of the interior! But, oh! how dirty most of them are. Pigs and chickens and goats and dogs are frequently to be seen in the front room or in the bed-room.

The country roads are little better than the streets in the city. In the first place, they are usually only as wide as the length of one stone. One seldom finds a road in China where two people can walk side by side. The Chinese are so accustomed to this that they always go singly even where there would be room to walk together. These roads are as much traveled as one of our most traveled streets. There is a constant stream of burden-bearers on them. They almost never go alone, but in long files—sort of caravans—for protection from highway robbers.

I somehow have not the slightest fear here. I never had in America the quiet feeling of perfect safety that I always have here.

Yesterday we walked down to the launch with some friends who were leaving. All along the way every child that we met had a patch of mud on his face. It was usually square on the end of his nose; but the farther we went the bigger the spots seemed to become till some had it almost all over the face. Even little girls, daintily enameled and painted, had a little spot somewhere. We finally discovered that it must be the day on which they propitiate the god of the fields, to plead for good crops.

On this same trip, for the first time in my life, I saw a leper. The lepers live in a house on one side of the city

(Diong-loh), but they are at perfect liberty to go about as they please, and need not cry, "Unclean." There is one woman who has the disease. She was betrothed, and just before the wedding was found to be a leper. Since then she has lived absolutely alone in her end of the asylum. In China there is no communication between the men in such a place and the women. The asylum is a beautiful spot! Everywhere about us is scenery such as I never found in Pennsylvania and New York, or even in Europe. This part of China is known as the "Switzerland of the orient." I don't know whether I have told you about the Min River or not—the river on which Foochow and Shaown (pronounced Show—like how-woo) are located. Ing-hok and Diong-loh are branches of it. It is called "The Rhine of the orient," and is said by those who have seen it to be the most beautiful river in the world, not excepting the Rhine and the Hudson. It is a very large river and has all kinds of wonderful scenery along its course. Near Shaowu there are terrific rapids. It takes a week for a boat to go up past them and two hours to come down! The rocks are only a few feet apart, and boats used especially for "shooting the rapids" are made just wide enough for two people to sit side by side on them, and very long. The boatmen are most skillful, and the girls who have taken the trip say it is most exciting sport.

Last week I began an account of a Sunday sightseeing trip. It is a Sunday trip because it is the simple journey from our house to the Diong-loh church, and it is sightseeing because we can't help seeing sights each step of

the way, though I am growing so accustomed to them that I begin not to notice them. I got only so far last week as to have my pen poised in air for the first word when I had to stop.

As our little procession of blue-clad, trousered maids emerges from the compound gate, carrying their hymn books and Bibles tied in handkerchiefs of varied colors, the view that bursts upon us is well worth going some distance to see. All about us, rolling back in their majesty, are grand old rocky hills and mountains, covered here with pine woods, there gnarled with huge masses of stubborn rock, and brightened now by a clump of crimson azaleas, now by lilacs, and again by delicate lavender azaleas. Here and there are beautiful big wild roses, often forming hedges along the terraced fields.

Down over the hillside, "Little Angel" leads our buffalo cow from among the many that are grazing along the hillsides, and hangs his head in shy delight as he sees the Su-gus, whom he is soon to follow to Sunday-school. Birds of many odd and beautiful kinds are flying near-by, un-afraid of either native or foreigner. One wings its way out over the plain and draws our eyes to the near-by Ohio-like view of level land immediately before us, ending in the un-Ohio-like Diong-loh pagoda far down in the distance.

A shout, that we mistake for a groan, calls my attention to a near-by field, one of the terraces by the side of the road along which we are descending the hill.

The curiously-shaped field (for the plains, full of them, look like crazy quilts or map puzzles) is flooded

with water, and has been since the early part of the rainy season. A man wearing a big round hat with pointed top, blue jeans, with trousers rolled almost to the hips, and up to his knees in the muddiest of yellow mud, is plowing! It is a rude native plow, drawn by a poor floundering ox, which sinks nearly to its body in the mud at every step. They creep along at the rate of two



The Plow in China

steps a minute. Each shout of the man is the signal for another step. It would seem more appropriate if the groans came from the poor, patient beast.

But our pity is suddenly drawn from the animal to a human object. By the roadside sits a white-faced creature, whether man or woman we cannot tell from the

filthy garments wrapped around the figure, head and all. But as we approach we see the wretched soul unwrapping her suffering, bound feet, and we know it is a woman. As her colorless hands slowly move about the task, one palm is turned upward for a moment, revealing some loathsome disease. As we pass on, with the horror of it chilling our blood, we realize that she probably will *never* have relief. What can native doctors do with their snakes and bugs? And Diong-loh has as yet no Christian physician in sight.

At the foot of the hill a small caravan of burden coolies meets us. They stop to mop their faces with their filthy blue cotton sashes—which some of them have been wearing around their waists and the others for turbans—and gaze in loudly-voiced astonishment at the foreigners. One of them says, “What are they?” Another suggests, “Foreign devils.” “Are they men or women?” is the next query. “Men,” is the prompt reply from one of them. “Don’t you see their long coats? And they wear queues wrapped around their heads like ours.” “What makes their skin so white?” another one asks, and, as we pass by laughing, we hear the reply from the one who seemed to have seen foreigners before, “Oh! they bathe twice every day, I have heard.” They then pick up their sticks with the loads attached to the ends, and groaning painfully, begin the steep ascent.

Several of them have baskets filled with sugar; others are carrying huge baskets of fertilizer; another has a large red frame filled with native delicacies for a wedding, and the rest have buckets of vile-smelling refuse.

We now come upon the first houses on the outskirts of the city, two coffin shops and an old heathen temple. A dog rushes ferociously at us, and at the same instant a baby darts out, and clasps its dirty little hands in front of its face, calling "Su-gu, bing ang! Su-gu, bing ang!" (good morning, ladies); then flies back to its mother, in terror over its daring deed! A little tuft of hair, the beginning of the queue to be, shoots up from the top of its head, surrounded by a cunning little, crownless cap of red flannel, with blue and gold embroidering on it. He wears a very dirty, plain blue cotton outer garment, over nobody knows how many layers of padded and unpadded ones, a pair of figured blue cotton trousers, more like short-legged, open overalls than any other American garment, and down the back, almost to his bare heels, flames a scarlet "shirt-tail." I don't know what his mother would call it, but I think that is probably what *yours* would think it was.

Beyond the temple we emerge upon another open slope, paved with steps of stone and shaded on one side by two huge, gnarled old banyan trees. On the other side it is lined with large, ornamental stone arches, erected to the honor of widows who have remained true to their dead for twenty-five or more years. A coolie woman is approaching us, bare-headed and clad in blue cotton jacket and short trousers. Her big bare feet proclaim her class in life, for, sad to say, as yet in many places the only women who have the comfort of natural feet are those who work in the fields or carry loads!

A little distance behind her come two bound-footed

women, one a mere child, hobbling along painfully, with the aid of long poles. Their faces bear the mark of their suffering all too plainly. One does not wonder that few ladies are to be seen walking. At a shout from the coolies



A Woman's Procession in China

carrying them, our procession stands aside to let two Sedan chairs pass us. The occupant of the first is a magistrate of the city, a pompous man, clad in silk. He

peers out curiously through the little space above his front curtain, and is gone. In the chair following, we see a penciled, painted and enameled little face, shyly peeping out at us, and guess that it may be the wife of the dignitary preceding.

As we approach the next house on the left we are attracted by brilliant red door posts, the sign that a wedding has occurred there sometime recently, as the red paper is new and fresh looking; for once put up it never comes off until it wears off.

The house is swarming with men sawing and chopping logs, children by the score, running out from among the coffins to see the "Su-gus," and mothers engaged in every kind of care of their infants; and they are all in the rooms that open upon the street. When I say *open*, I mean it; there is no wall there at all during the day.

Against one wall stands a bed, with its occupant in full view of the street. At a counter in the store adjoining, sits a little girl (she can't be over five), calmly puffing at a huge nickel pipe, whose bowl is down below her knees. Across the street kneels a woman, with her tiny feet held up in the air behind her—washing clothes in a mud puddle! She uses the stone paving for a wash-board, and has dammed up a little place where the gutter would be, if there were one, and has caught enough rain to do a washing. But the Ohio river water, after a flood, can't be compared with the yellow color of this!

A little farther on we are met by a gathering throng of children, some of whom attend our new little day school, and all of whom come to our Sunday afternoon

neighborhood meetings. One house after another, little huts and big ancestral halls, rice shops and plow stores, all pour forth their contributions to the throng. They beam at us and fairly overwhelm us with their "Bing-angs." Presently one shyly proffers a rose; another gives two, and before we realize it we are laden with their childish offerings. And our hearts sing as we feel the difference in their attitude from that which they showed a few weeks before the meetings began. Then it was terror lest the "foreign devils" would catch them. Now, they smile confidently at us, and count us their friends. Their parents, some of them at least, look on indulgently, and we feel that if even they themselves should never yield to the truth of the gospel, there is strong hope in the generation of these children.

We come now to the first street corner. As we turn down toward the center of the city many curious eyes follow us. One little boy is wandering in from the fields, deep in thought. Suddenly he realizes that there is some strange presence near by, and looks up. A startled expression comes into his eyes, and we smile reassuringly. "The foreign old women" have seen him! There is no telling what they may be planning to do to him! With a little howl of terror he turns and flees. As far as we can watch he is still running at top speed. The men in the shops near-by see it and call, "Run, run! they'll catch you!" and a sadness falls upon our hearts, till, with a prayer for the boy, we remember that in a few weeks just such frightened children have become confident little friends as did those who gave us the roses. * *

It is nearly time to flee to the mountains from the heat, cholera and plague that are always in the city during the summer months. Already we hear there are several cases both of cholera and of bubonic plague. But before we go we are to take a country trip to visit a number of pastors, churches, Bible women and day schools, through the villages of the plain east of us, out toward the sea.

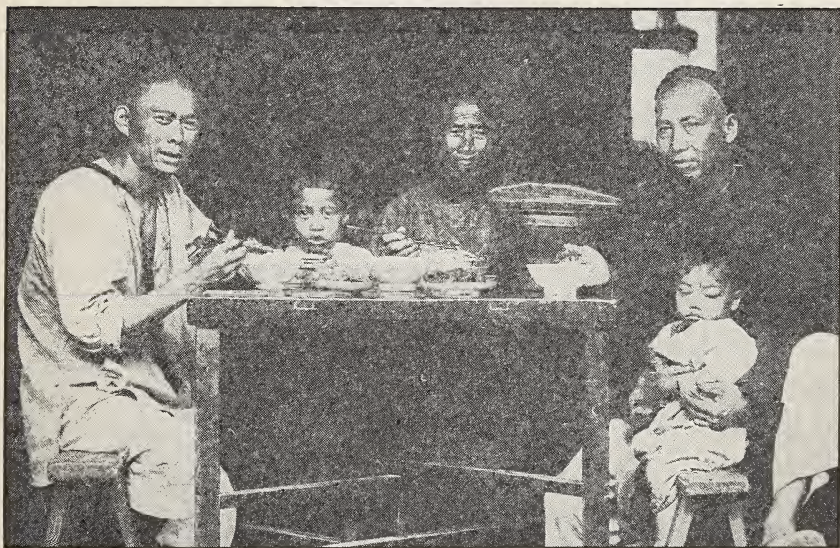
Time is too short to tell of all the villages through which we passed. I must be content to let you peep next into our lodgings for the night, at Kong-cheng. We arrived about dusk at a big, stone compound wall, inside which are the Kong-cheng church, the pastor's home and the day school. We were ushered through a large open court, past the central hall, which serves for the chapel auditorium, through a succession of bed-rooms to a little hallway, out of which arose a steep, narrow staircase, only a hair's breadth removed from a ladder. We climbed this and found two loft rooms under the eaves. Here we are spending Saturday, Sunday and Monday nights. The walls are very picturesque in their genuine Chinese decorations of unpainted sections of logs and mud plaster. The roof consists merely of the beams and tiles (held in place by bricks or other weights). It has two skylights. Each one is as high as a brick. That was originally the nearest approach to windows the place could boast. But last year Miss Perkins had two port holes put in. She asked for windows, and got port holes. But they are not to be despised.

The stairway end of that outer room has an open banister, and the other end, just under the eaves, has an elevated platform across the end of the room, separated from the outer court and curved roof by a similar railing. This platform is the bed. As the natives use it, a straw mat is laid on the boards (often just a strip of common matting), a hard wooden pillow is set in place, and it is ready for occupancy. We are more fortunate. We have a woven rattan affair, loaned us by the pastor, to lay on top, and it is a shade softer. Besides, we have a thin quilt and sheets and a softer pillow than theirs. (Mine is a rolled up cotton blanket.) Above the bed we have hung from the beams a mosquito netting, which is the greatest comfort in the room. If one "scoots" into bed and jerks it down instantly behind her, she usually can get in without any accompanying mosquitoes, though their music is fully as loud as a stringed orchestra a block away. Here and there a huge spider, three or four inches in diameter, appears sprawling out on the wall alarmingly close to where we are standing, or rats squeal in the walls just at the head of our bed, and a long tail suddenly protrudes through a crack.

But we have enjoyed our quarters notwithstanding these few unpleasantnesses. It is more like camp life than anything else I have done since I came here.

The chief drawback is the unavoidable publicity. There are no walls or doors at the two ends of the room, and people can appear whenever they please to make friendly calls. They frequently do so before we are up and after we have retired, when we are eating and when

we are having our morning bath. Two women came up on Saturday evening when we were just finishing our supper. At first they stood for a time on the stairs, discussing us in awed whispers. At last they ventured in, stood looking over our table, fingered our bread, felt the sharp prongs of our forks and the cutting edge of our knives, then turned to the bed, lifted up the covers,



A Supper of Rice

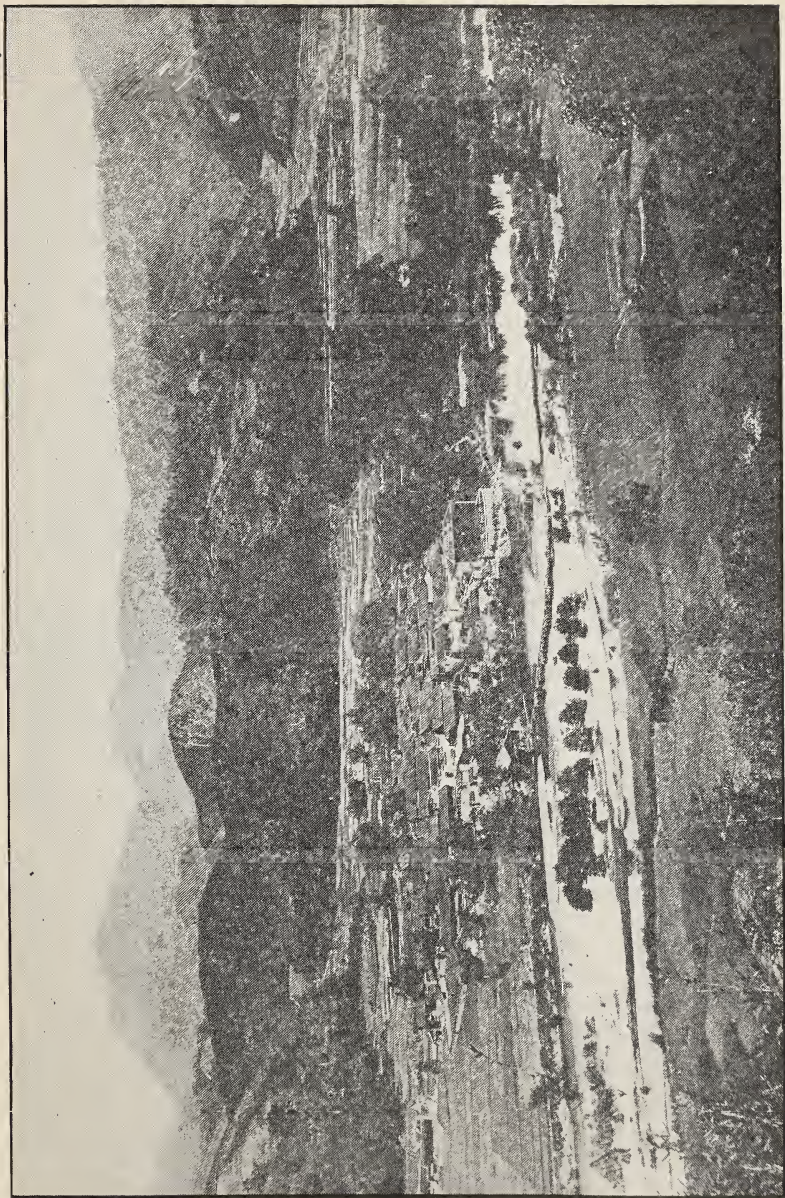
touched the mattress, marveling at its wonderful softness, and so on all over the room. At length, after they had done several things not very conducive to a steady stomach, we politely asked them if they had eaten. Being answered in the negative, as we had hoped, with extreme politeness we invited them to go and eat, to "eat very slowly," and they departed, saying, as they gave a last

look at our supper table, "Su-gu, we eat a big bowl of rice, so big (showing the size of a capacious pitcher), and you eat just that little bit of cake." We did not explain that that was our "last course," both because they would be utterly unable to understand why everything was not in evidence at once—and that in bowls for common use—and because the Chinese think it a mark of politeness to eat little.

That night Miss Perkins examined the classes. They wished it so, that they might be "peaceful over Sunday." The next morning we had church at 10.30, late enough to allow us to have a delightful English service all to ourselves first. The pastor is not only the incumbent of the priestly office, but choir and organist as well.

I often wonder what some of you fastidious musicians would do if you could suddenly hear the music in one of these church services. It is incomparably better where the people have had a church for a generation and where the children are being educated, but in these comparatively new organizations the blaring forth of fervid emotion, shrieking out of all tune on the high notes, while others are singing softly and low would, but for the earnestness and unconsciousness of anything wrong, be decidedly funny. But one soon forgets the amusing side in the joy of seeing souls saved from the terrible evils as much in evidence all about us as are the unmusical music.

We had expected to go to Sung-ha on Monday, but word came that the bubonic plague was there, so we had to forego that part of our trip. Instead, we waited till noon and then started out on a leisurely trip to the other



A Village at the Foot of the Min Rapids

Kong-cheng' day school, to a new house that is in process of building, a big monastery in the hills, and finally to the beautiful little village of Leng-ha, taking pictures at all of these places. If the country through which we traveled to-day were in the United States, it certainly would be a national park, and the people would come from every part of the world to see it. *I have never seen anything anywhere so magnificent, so inspiring, so beautiful and so varied in its forms of beauty as this part of the Fukien Province.*

After about a three-hour ride, we came suddenly in sight of a little Oberammergau, nestling among the foothills below us. Somehow, from the moment that the view burst upon us, much as Jerusalem must have come into view of the triumphal procession, the little town took a special hold on my heart.

As we descended, the coolies began to say to each other, "My, but there is a difference in Nang-iong since we were here two years ago. At that time there wasn't a place to set your foot upon the floor of the house where we went, it was so dirty. But it's as clean as the foreigner's houses and they have built a new bed-room. There's a wonderful difference."

And there certainly was a difference between that place and all the others where we were entertained in raw heathen villages. The people, too, while the majority are not yet Christians, seem to be of a more gentle, trusting disposition than those we found in any other place.

After examinations were over, Miss Perkins spoke beautifully to them, we sang a hymn and prayed, distributed Sunday-school cards and came away. It was half past four when we left, so most of our return trip was in the cool of the evening, and it was delightful.

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